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AUTHOR Benoit, William L.
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ABSTRACT

Both rhetorical theorists and attitude change theorists agree that characteristics of the source of persuasive communication can improve the persuasiveness of that message. Writers from both perspectives have approached this notion from two divergent perspectives. Isocrates was concerned with the speaker's prior reputation, which is quite similar to the extrinsic credibility studies that vary the characteristics of the source connected with the message. He also declared that prior reputation lent greater persuasiveness to all the words of the speech. Aristotle explicitly rejected the notion of ethos, focusing instead on variations in the language of the speech to create different impressions of the character of the speaker. This is quite similar to the extrinsic studies of credibility, which vary language, delivery, and rhetorical devices so as to alter the impression of the speaker and enhance effectiveness. Empirical studies have consistently supported the former conception, while the latter has been plagued by mixed results. Interestingly, one explanation for these results, drawn from the cognitive response approach, is quite close to Isocrates's explanation of ethos--that it lends persuasiveness to all the words of the speech. (HOD)

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"ISOCRATES, ARISTOTLE, AND CREDIBILITY RESEARCH"

William L. Benoit
Department of Speech and Dramatic Art
University of Missouri, Columbia
Columbia, Missouri

Speech Communication Association Convention
Chicago, Illinois
November, 1984

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"ISOCRATES, ARISTOTLE, AND CREDIBILITY RESEARCH"

ABSTRACT

The conception of ethos developed by Isocrates and Aristotle are contrasted. For the former, ethos is the most important mode of persuasion, and he considers it to be the speaker's prior reputation. For the latter, ethos is very important, although less so than is the enthymeme, and it is developed by the message itself.

Empirical research on source characteristics can in large measure be divided into two similar approaches, which Andersen and Clevenger label extrinsic and intrinsic. The extrinsic paradigm attributes a single message to speakers with different levels of credibility, while the intrinsic method varies message and/or delivery, assuming that these variations will alter the credibility of the source, thereby mediating attitude change.

Social scientific research employing the extrinsic paradigm finds that high credibility sources produce significantly greater attitude change than low credibility sources on a fairly consistent basis. However, studies employing the other paradigm is mixed. An explanation of these results, based in part of Isocrates' writings, is advanced.

"ISOCRATES, ARISTOTLE, AND CREDIBILITY RESEARCH"

Introduction

The concept of ethos (ἔθος, or character or habit) or credibility has long been of interest to both rhetorical and communication scholars. One of the greatest practitioners of oratory, Marcus Tullius Cicero, declares that "A potent factor in success, then, is for the characters, principles, conduct and course of life, both of those who are to plead cases and of their clients, to be approved" (II.182). Quintilian, author of one of the most significant treatises on rhetorical education, makes this claim: "that he is a good man. . . no doubt is the best support" for a speaker (V.xii.9). Thus, key rhetorical theorists hold that ethos is "a potent factor in success," "the best support" available to the rhetor.

This belief in the significance of ethos in persuasion is not limited to orators and rhetorical educators of antiquity. Andersen and Clevenger, in their now-classic review of empirical research in this realm, report that "the finding is almost universal that the ethos of the source is related in some way to the impact of the message" (77). Littlejohn, in his review empirical research on credibility, reports that 40 out of 50 studies found that "All other variables equal, cues as to source credibility or prestige extrinsic to the message significantly affect attitude, opinion, and judgment" (38). Insko's review of the literature concludes that "In view of the high degree of consistency in this source credibility literature we can safely generalize that a high credibility source will be more influential than a low credibility source" (49). Thus, this concept has

received attention from numerous researchers in various disciplines, and their research collectively finds that it is a significant factor in social influence.

However, two quite distinct conceptions of ethos were developed in ancient Athens: one advanced by Isocrates and another by Aristotle. This has not been adequately recognized in previous scholarship. For example, Sattler, in his review of classical notions of ethos barely mentions the former and fails to acknowledge their fundamental differences. On the empirical side, Andersen and Clevenger have recognized that two different conceptions of ethos can be found in the studies they surveyed: "extrinsic," which refers to identification of the speaker, and "intrinsic," which refers to credibility developed in the speech.

This essay has several interrelated purposes, all revolving around a desire to clarify and integrate rhetorical and social scientific research on a concept of common concern. First, the conceptions of ethos articulated by Isocrates and Aristotle will be explicated and contrasted. Then empirical literature on credibility will be examined. Finally, an attempt will be made to integrate the two traditions.

Conceptions of Ethos in Ancient Greek Rhetoric

Isocrates was selected for study for three separate reasons. First, and most importantly, his notion of credibility contrasts with that of Aristotle. Second, these two rhetoricians were in direct competition in Athens as heads of rival educational institutions. In fact, one oft repeated anecdote declares that Aristotle began lecturing on rhetoric at Plato's Academy in direct response to Isocrates. Here is Cicero's version of this story:

> Accordingly when Aristotle observed that Isocrates succeeded in obtaining a distinguished set of pupils by abandoning legal and political subjects and devoting his discourses to empty elegance of style, he himself suddenly altered almost the whole of his own system of training, and quoted a line from Philoctetes with a slight modification: the hero in the tragedy said that it was a disgrace for him to keep silent and suffer barbarians to speak, but Aristotle put in "suffer Isocrates to speak"; and consequently he put the whole of his system in a polished and brilliant form, and linked the scientific study of facts with practice in style (III.139).

Similar versions of this story can also be found in Philodemus (329) and Quintilian (III.i.14). Incidently, Cicero's bias toward Aristotle shows through rather clearly in this passage, which makes his praise of Isocrates (discussed subsequently) all the more impressive.

A third reason for selecting Isocrates, although he tends to be overlooked today, is that he is without question one of the greatest teachers of rhetoric, if not the greatest. Cicero hails him as the "Master of all rhetoricians," and exclaims that from his "school, as from the horse of Troy, none but leaders emerged" (II.94). Quintilian reports that "the pupils of Isocrates were eminent in every branch of study" (III.i.14) and that "It is to the school of Isocrates that we owe the greatest orators" (XII.x.22). Dionysius of Halicarnassus reports that "He became the outstanding figure among the famous men of his day, and the teacher of the most eminent men at Athens and in Greece at large, both the best forensic orators, and those who distin-

guished in politics and public life. Historians, too, were among his pupils" (1). Thus, in ancient Athens and Greece, Isocrates was an important rhetorical educator.

Aristotle's conception of ethos also merits our attention. While Isocrates may have been the more successful teacher of rhetoric judged in their time, Aristotle has been more important in the history of rhetoric. The claim that Aristotle's Rhetoric, is one of the most influential and long-lived treatises on this art is hardly controversial. His conception of ethos, in particular, has been the subject of considerable study, including the fairly recent studies of Sattler, Pross, Corts, and Miller. Finally, as suggested earlier, his theory contrasts with that of Isocrates. With this explanation of the reasons for selecting these two classical theorists complete, we can turn to an explication of their views of ethos.

Isocrates' Conception of Ethos

Although Isocrates reportedly wrote a treatise on rhetoric, it is no longer extant (Benoit). This undoubtedly accounts in large measure for the fact that he has received far less attention than Aristotle. We are forced to infer his views from remarks made in those speeches of his which do survive today. In the Antidosis, Isocrates makes it clear that he considers the speaker's ethos, or prior reputation, to be more important than the substance of the discourse:

> The man who wishes to persuade people will not be negligent as to the matter of character; no, on the contrary, he will apply himself above all to establish a most honourable name among his fellow-citizens; for who does not know that words

> carry a greater conviction when spoken by men of good repute than when spoken by men who live under a cloud, and that the argument which is made by a man's life is of more weight than that which is furnished by words? (278)

It is worth stressing that it is the speaker's prior reputation which concerns Isocrates: "men of good repute," "men who live under a cloud." He even explicitly juxtaposes the "argument which is made by a man's life" with "that which is furnished by words." This passage makes his meaning even more obvious:

> probabilities and proofs and all forms of persuasion support only the points in a case to which they are severally applied, whereas an honourable reputation not only lends greater persuasiveness to the words of the man who possesses it, but adds greater luster to his deeds, and is, therefore, more zealously to be sought after by men of intelligence than anything else in the world (280).

It is clear that Isocrates considered ethos to be the most persuasive tool of the rhetor--more effective than pro babilities and proofs--and he construed ethos to be the reputation a speaker develops throughout life and brings to the speech situation.

Aristotle's Conception of Ethos

Aristotle considered ethos to be an important aspect of persuasion, writing that "We believe good men more fully and more readily than others; this is true generally whatever the question is, and absolutely where exact certainty is impossible and opinions divided"

(1356a6-8). This sounds similar to Isocrates' position, albeit Aristotle does not specifically mention prior reputation. He also declares that "It is not true, as some writers assume in their treatises on rhetoric, that the personal goodness revealed by the speaker contributes nothing to his power of persuasion; on the contrary, his character may almost be called the most effective means of persuasion he possesses" (1356a10-14). Here the differences begin to appear. Aristotle's praise here is qualified ("may almost be called"), and elsewhere he explicitly states that "Persuasion is clearly a sort of Demonstration. . . the orator's demonstration is an enthymeme and this, in general, is the most effective means of persuasion" (1355a3-8). Thus, Aristotle, while recognizing the importance of ethos, reserves his greatest endorsement for the sort of proof derived from logos or pragma.

Other passages quite clearly rule out the "prior reputation" notion of ethos. First, consider that Aristotle refers to the three "modes of persuasion furnished by the spoken word" (1356a1-2), as opposed to one which relies on past actions. More specifically, he writes that "Persuasion is achieved by the speaker's personal character when the speech is so spoken as to make us think him credible" (1356a4-5). A few lines later his position is rendered crystal clear: "this kind of persuasion [ethos], like the others, should be achieved by what the speaker says, not by what people think of him before he begins to speak" (1356a8-10). This statement can leave no doubt that for Aristotle, ethos was created by the words of the speech itself, not by the speaker's prior reputation. Cope recognizes this in his commentary on Aristotle's Rhetoric.

We all know that the three aspects of character are "good sense,

good moral character, and good will" (1378a6-9). After discussing one advantage of maxims, Aristotle explains that:

> There is another which is more important--it invests a speech with moral character. There is moral character in every speech in which the moral purpose is conspicuous, and maxims always produce this effect, because the utterance of them amounts to a general declaration of moral principles: so that, if the maxims are sound, they display the speaker as a man of sound moral character (1395b13-16).

In other words, inclusion of sound maxims in a speech will enhance that speaker's ethos.

Later, Aristotle notes the importance of language to all three modes of persuasion: "Your language will be appropriate if it expresses emotion and character, and if it corresponds to its subject matter" (1408a11). In two other passages Aristotle explains that his discussion of the types of character is designed to permit rhetors to employ these ideas so as to create impressions of their character:

> We now have to consider Virtue and Vice, the Noble and the Base, since these are the objects of praise and blame. We shall at the same time be finding out how to make our hearers take the required view of our own character--our second method of persuasion (1366a23-28; see also 1378a16).

More specifically, he writes that "If, then, a speaker uses the very words which are in keeping with a particular disposition, he will reproduce the corresponding character; for a rustic and an educated

man will not say the same things nor speak in the same way" (1408a30). Thus, ethos is not simply prior reputation for Aristotle, but is something artfully developed through the words of the speech itself.

Incidently, this conception of ethos is consistent with Aristotle's interest in artistic proofs. Aristotle explains that:

> Of the modes of persuasion some belong strictly to the art of rhetoric and some do not. By the latter I mean such things as are not supplied by the speaker but are there at the outset--witnesses, evidence given under torture, written contracts, and so on. By the former I mean such as we can ourselves construct by means of the principles of rhetoric. The one kind has merely to be used, the other has to be invented (1344b36-40).

Of course, the speaker's prior reputation is "there at the outset," not something the rhetor invents along with other arguments. This is not to say that Aristotle considered prior reputation to be one of the forms of inartistic proof--he states that they "are five in number: laws, witnesses, contracts, torture, oaths" (1375b24-25). The only claim advanced here is that his lack of concern for prior reputation and his keen interest in ethos developed by the language of a speech is consistent with his belief that the modes of persuasion which belong to rhetoric should be invented by the rhetor.

Aristotle and Isocrates on Ethos

Thus, these two ancient rhetoricians disagree about the nature of ethos. For Isocrates, arguably the greatest teacher of rhetoric, ethos is the speaker's prior reputation, developed during life. It is

the most important mode of persuasion because it lends weight to all of the words of the speaker, and he specifically declares that it is more useful than probabilities and proofs. For Aristotle, whose philosophical treatise on rhetoric is one of the most influential in the history of rhetoric, ethos is important in persuasion, but less so than the proof created by enthymemes. Explicitly rejecting the claim that it is the impression the audience has of the orator before the speech, he declares that it is created by the speaker through skillful use of language. Given the competition between their educational establishments, it is not surprising to discover that the lines distinguishing their theories are drawn so sharply.

It is interesting to note that the pupils of Isocrates distinguish themselves as orators. Isocrates boasts of a number of his pupils who were crowned with bold by Athens, and of Timotheus, a prominent Athenian general who studied with him (104-37). The Pseudo-Plutarch recounts that, among others, Isocrates' students included three of the Attic Orators: Hypereides, Isaeus, and Lycurgus (X.837C-D, X.8.41B). While Aristotle's treatise on rhetoric has been immensely influential in the history of rhetoric, we know of no pupils of his who could compare to those of Isocrates in skill or success in public discourse. There is, of course, no evidence that this differential success of their students is a function of their divergent conceptions of ethos: too many other explanations are possible. Still, this sort of speculation is difficult to suppress.

Empirical Research on Credibility

Empirical researchers have tended to study the concept of credibility from two distinct perspectives. The first, and most common approach, which Andersen and Clevenger label "extrinsic," attributes a single message to several sources with different levels of credibility. Since the message and its presentation remain constant, any differences in attitude change must be a function of variations in the sources' credibility. The second paradigm, "intrinsic" credibility, prepares different messages and/or different presentations of a message, assuming that those differences will create differential credibility in the source, which in turn will mediate attitude change.

Empirical Research on Extrinsic Credibility

As early as 1936, researchers have investigated the relationship between the credibility and persuasiveness of sources of persuasive messages. Lorge and Curtis found that messages attributed to a highly credible source did result in greater opinion change than a disreputable source. Others who have found a significant main effect for source credibility on attitude change include Haiman; Hovland and Weiss; Zajonc and Harter; Choo; Koslin, Stoop, and Loh; Brewer and Crano, Miller and Basehart; and McGinnies and Ward.

Three studies found support for the hypothesis that high credibility sources can obtain more attitude change than low credibility sources by advocating messages of greater discrepancy from the audience's own opinion (Aronson, Carlsmith, and Turner; Bochner and Insko; and Koslin, Stoops, and Loh). Similarly, Hewgill and Miller found that high credibility sources can be more persuasive than low by using

higher levels of fear appeals.

Several studies have focused on specific attributes of sources. Attractive sources are more persuasive than unattractive ones (Horai, Naccari, and Fatoullah; Eagly and Chaiken; and Norman), and expertise can create attitude change (Horai, Naccari, and Fatoullah; Maddux and Rogers; and McGinnies and Ward). When attractiveness is controlled, sources perceived as similar cause more attitude change than dissimilar ones (Berscheid). As suggested earlier, Littlejohn's review of the literature discovered numerous studies supporting the effects of credibility on attitude change.

However, this extrinsic credibility effect is not without its limitations. First, in forced compliance studies, subjects who agree to perform a counter-attitudinal action show more attitude change when that act was requested by a negative than a positive source (Zimbardo, Weisenberg, Firestone, and Levy), probably a rationalization effect. Studies have found that on highly involving topics, source credibility has little or no effect on persuasion (Johnson and Scileppi; Chaiken; and Petty, Cacioppo,and Goldman). The controversial "sleeper effect," if it exists, suggests that attitude change mediated by source credibility is not persistent, and that as messages tend to become disassociated with sources, attitude change from high credibility sources decreases while attitude change from low credibility sources increases (Hovland and Weiss; Kelman and Hovland; Schulman and Worrall; Gillig and Greenwald; Gruder, Cook, Hennigan, Flay, Alessi, and Halamaj; Hennigan, Cook, and Gruder; Capon and Hulbert; Cook and Flay; Cook, Gruder, Hennigan, and Flay). Studies have even found moderately credible sources more persuasive than highly credible sources when the

audience already agrees with the speaker (Bock and Saine; Dean, Austin, and Watts; Bochner and Insko; and Sternthal, Dholakia, and Leavitt). Despite these limitations, the effect of differential amounts of attitude change from messages attributed to sources of differing credibility is a well-documented one.

Intrinsic Credibility

Several studies have investigated the notion that message and presentational variables can influence perceived source credibility and hence mediate persuasion. Two investigations by McCroskey (1967, 1970) found that the use of evidence increased perceived authoritativeness of the speaker and the amount of attitude change. Bowers and Osborn's study supported the hypothesis that inclusion of a metaphor increased both credibility and attitude change. Seiler demonstrated that inclusion of visual aids in a persuasive communication adds to the credibility and effectiveness of a speaker. In several studies, Bradac and associates investigated language diversity, which enhances both credibility and speech effectiveness. Erickson, Lind, Johnson, and O'Barr, in their study of speech in the courtroom, discovered that "powerless speech" (characterized by hedges, hesitation, questioning intonations, and intensifiers) tended to reduce credibility and attitude change. Miller, Maruyana, Besler, and Valone found that speaking rate is directly related to both credibility and attitude change. Finalluency and organization both positively influence persuasiveness and credibility (McCroskey and Mehrley). Thus, studies of both content variables (e.g., evidence, language, metaphor, organization) and delivery have supported the intrinsic credibility paradigm.

However, several studies fail to support these assumptions about the relationship between message/presentation variables and credibility and attitude change. The earliest was conducted in 1949, when Thompson measured Dewey's ethos both before and after subjects listened to one of his speeches. Dewey's credibility improved after they heard his speech, but there was no corresponding increase in the acceptability of his ideas or his candidacy.

Warren reports that neutral-credibility speakers who use highly credible authority-based assertions are more persuasive but not perceived as more credible than speakers relying upon less credible sources of evidence. The use of analogy enhances persuasiveness but not credibility (McCroskey and Combs), results complicated for simile and metaphor (Reinsch). Baker found that perceived organization improves ratings of credibility, but has no effect on influence.

Studies of delivery are also mixed. Pearce and Brommel manipulated style of delivery and discovered that a conversational style aids credibility but not effectiveness. Studies by Bowers and Miller and Hewgill confirm this effect (Miller and Hewgill do not report the nonsignificant attitude change results, but McCroskey and Mehrley do). Disfluencies reduced the credibility but not the persuasibility in Sereno and Hawkins' study.

Thus, the studies employing the intrinsic approach to credibility can be divided into three groups. Those which discover that variations in the message/delivery create both significant credibility and attitude change support its assumptions. The studies which find that variations in message and delivery variables result in attitude change but not in altered credibility are not problematic: no adherent to

this paradigm claims that every factor which mediates attitude change necessarily influences perceived credibility (although no clear theoretical approach to deciding which variables ought to influence it and which do not has been developed). The studies which are difficult to reconcile are those which found that changes in the message and/or its delivery affect credibility but not attitude change. Since studies in the extrinsic paradigm generally find that messages attributed to sources with higher credibility are more persuasive, why aren't the sources with induced increases in credibility more persuasive than those without such increases?

Two possible explanations exist for this state of affairs. One is that the credibility induced from message/delivery variations is in some way different from credibility induced from source identification. Two difficulties inhere in this explanation. First, the first group of studies reported in this section found that sources with high induced credibility were more persuasive. Second, this explanation assumes that credibility measures and manipulation checks are unable to distinguish between these two sorts of credibility, which seems unlikely.

A much more plausible explanation can be constructed from the cognitive response model of persuasion (Greenwald; Petty, Ostrom, and Brock). This approach suggests that the audience's thoughts serve as mediating variables between the persuasive message and attitude change. Receivers think about in-coming messages, producing supportive arguments when they agree with the message, and counter-arguments when they disagree. Greenwald indicates that published research has not established high correlations between retention of message content and persuasion. On the other hand, considerable research concludes

that individual cognitive responses to persuasive communication is a significant determinant of attitude change (Brock; Cacioppo and Petty; and Cook). Thus, the audience's cognitive responses may well be the determining factor in attitude change. A source of high credibility may well mediate attitude change by suppressing counter-argumentation--that is, the audience is less likely to question a highly credible source than one lacking in credibility (Sternthal, Dholakia, and Leavitt). On the other hand, we may well listen even more critically to a source we know is not credible than one that we know nothing about.

This explains why messages are more persuasive when the source is identified before the message than after. Ward and McGinnies found no difference in attitude change between high and low credible sources when identified after the speech (i.e., it was too late for knowledge of the fact that the speaker is highly credible to suppress counter-arguing). Early mention of non-credible sources was less persuasive than late mention of non-credible sources, which is consistent with the suggestion made earlier. Husek and Eagly and Chaiken also found that credible sources produce more attitude change when identified before than after the message. This effect may not occur with attractive (as opposed to expert) sources (Husek; Eagly and Chaiken).

This conception of the way in which source credibility mediates attitude change also explains one limitation on the extrinsic paradigm noted earlier. When we agree with the speaker, we produce supportive arguments. However, when the source is highly credible, we are less motivated to produce such arguments than when the source is only moderately credible. Thus, the cognitive response model may explain

why moderately credible sources are more persuasive than highly credible ones when the audience is in agreement with the speaker.

How then does this relate to the intrinsic credibility model? On this view, message and/or delivery variables induce changes in the perceived credibility of the speaker. Credibility induction must take place early enough in the message to influence processing of the message. That is to say, if the perceived credibility increases early on in the message, the audience will begin to question that source's ideas less. However, if the sources credibility is enhanced too late, the audience will already have produced sufficient counter-arguments to inhibit persuasiveness. Thus, the results which support the intrinsic credibility approach may well come from studies in which the source's credibility was increased early enough to inhibit much of the audience's counter-arguments, while results which do not support it could very well come from studies in which credibility was increased, but not early enough to stop substantial counterarguing.

Although it is convenient to suggest that there is a "point" at which the source's credibility is enhanced, in most studies this is probably a gradual process (e.g., with each use of evidence the audience's opinion of the source rises a bit), although no research has examined this process. Furthermore, although "early enough" is vague, it is unlikely that more specificity is possible. If this interpretation of the cognitive response model is correct, then source credibility enhances persuasion by reducing counterarguing. Thus, the if there is nothing controversial in the last half of the speech, there is likely to be little counter-arguing to worry about. On the other hand, if the conclusion is very controversial, the speaker may be more successful even if credibility enhancement does not occur

until the end of the speech.

Conclusion

Both rhetorical theorists and attitude change theorists agree that characteristics of the source of persuasive communication can improve the persuasiveness of that message. Writers from both perspectives have approached this notion from two divergent perspectives. Isocrates is concerned with the speaker's prior reputation, which is quite similar to the extrinsic credibility studies which vary the characteristics of the source connected with the message. He also declares that prior reputation lends greater persuasiveness to all of the words of the speech. Aristotle explicitly rejects the notion of ethos founded upon "what people think of him before he begins to work," focusing instead on variations in the language or words of the speech to create different impressions of the character of the speaker, or through the inclusion of rhetorical devices (i.e., maxims). This is quite similar to the extrinsic studies of credibility which vary language, delivery, and rhetorical devices (e.g., evidence, analogies) so as to alter the impression of the speaker and enhance effectiveness.

Empirical studies have quite consistently supported the former conception (with some limitations noted earlier), while the latter is plagued by mixed results. Interestingly enough, one explanation for these results, drawn from the cognitive response approach, is quite close to Isocrates' explanation of ethos (it lends persuasiveness to all of the words of the speech), and he was the rhetorician whose pupils were distinguished orators.

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